Brahmacharya - Celibacy

The Mahabharata, Santi Parva, Section CCXIV
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Addressing King Yudhishthira

Bhishma said: I shall now tell thee what the means are (for conquering the senses) as seen with the eye of the scriptures. A person, O king, will attain to the highest end by the help of such knowledge and by framing his conduct accordingly. Amongst all living creatures man is said to be the foremost. Among men, those that are regenerate have been called the foremost; and amongst the regenerate, they that are conversant with the Vedas. These last are regarded as the souls of all living creatures. Indeed, those Brahmanas (Brahmins) that are conversant with the Vedas are regarded as all seeing and omniscient. They are persons who have become conversant with Brahman (the Supreme Reality). As a blind man, without a guide, encounters many difficulties on a road, so has a person destitute of knowledge to encounter many obstacles in the world. For this reason, those that are possessed of knowledge are regarded as superior to the rest.

Those that are desirous of acquiring virtue practise diverse kinds of rites according to the dictates of the scriptures. They do not, however, succeed in attaining to Emancipation, all that they gain being those good qualities of which I shall presently speak.

[Note: Bhishma desires to show the difference between the religion of Pravritti or acts and that of Nivritti or abstention from acts. Those that follow the former cannot attain to Emancipation. What they gain are certain good qualities mentioned in the next verse, which, however, are equally gained by the followers of the religion of Nivritti. See Page ‘Pravritti- Nivritti’.]

Purity of speech, of body, and of mind, forgiveness, truth, steadiness, and intelligence, - these good qualities are displayed by righteous persons observant of both kinds of religion. That which is called Brahmacharya (religion of abstention or Yoga) is regarded as the means of attaining to Brahman. That is the foremost of all religions. It is by the practice of that religion that one obtains the highest end (viz., Emancipation).

Brahmacharya is divested of all connection with the five vital breaths, mind, understanding, the five senses of perception, and the five senses of action. It is on that account free from all the perceptions that the senses give. It is heard only as a word, and its form, without being seen, can only be conceived. It is a state of existence depending only on the mind. It is free from all connection with the senses. That sinless state should be attained to by the understanding alone. He that practises it duly attains to Brahman; he that practises it half, attains to the condition of the gods; while he that practises it indifferently, takes birth among Brahmanas (Brahmins) and possessed of learning attains to eminence.

Brahmacharya is exceedingly difficult to practice. Listen now to the means (by which one may practise it). That regenerate person who betakes himself to it should subdue the quality of Passion as soon as it begins to manifest itself or as soon as it begins to be powerful. One that has betaken oneself to that vow should not speak with women. He should never cast his eyes on an undressed woman. The sight of women, under even different circumstances, fills all weak-minded men with Passion. If a person (while observing this vow) feels a desire for woman rising in his heart, he should (as an expiation) observe the vow called Krichcchra and also pass three days in water.

[Note: The vow of Krichcchra consists of certain fasts. 'Pass three days in water', i.e., stand in water tank or stream with water up to the chin.]

If desire is entertained in course of a dream, one should, diving in water, mentally repeat for three times the three Riks by Aghamarshana.

[Note: The three Riks begin with Ritamcha Satyamcha etc. Every Brahmana who knows his morning and evening prayers knows these three Riks well. (These three Riks are reproduced at the foot of this article.)]

That wise man who has betaken himself to the practice of this vow should, with an extended and enlightened mind, burn the sins in his mind which are due to the quality of Passion. As the duct that bears away the refuse of the body is very closely connected with the body, even so the embodies soul is very closely connected with the body that confines it. The different kinds of juices, passing through the network of arteries, nourish men's wind and bile and phlegm, blood and skin and flesh, intestines and bones and marrow, and the whole body. Know that there are ten principal ducts. These assist the functions of the five senses. From these ten branch out thousands of other ducts that are minuter in form. Like rivers filling the ocean at the proper season, all these ducts, containing juices nourish the body. Leading to the heart, there is a duct called Manovaha. It draws from every part of the human body the vital seed, which is born of desire.

Numerous other ducts branching out from that principal one extend into every part of the body and bearing the element of heat cause the sense of vision (and the rest). As the butter that lies within milk is churned up by churning rod, even so the desires that are generated in the mind (by the sight or thought of women) draw together the vital seed that lies within the body. In the midst of even our dreams, passion having birth in imagination assails the mind, with the result that the duct already named, viz., Manovaha, throws out the vital seed born of desire.

The great and divine Rishi Atri is well conversant with the subject of the generation of the vital seed. The juices that are yielded by food, the duct called Manovaha, and the desire that is born of imagination,- these three are causes that originate the vital seed which has Indra for its presiding deity. The passion that aids in the emission of this fluid is, therefore, called Indriya. Those persons who know that the course of vital seed is the cause of (that sinful state of things called) intermixture of castes, are men of restrained passions. Their sins are regarded to have been burnt off, and they are never subjected to rebirth. He that betakes himself to action simply for the purposes of sustaining his body, reducing with the aid of the mind the (three) attributes (of Goodness, Passion and Darkness) into a state of uniformity, and brings at his last moments the vital breaths to the duct called Manovaha, escapes the obligation of rebirth.

[Note: ‘With the aid of the mind’ means Yoga Dehakarma means one whose acts are undertaken only for the purpose of sustaining the body, i.e., one who does no act that is not strictly necessary for supporting life; hence, as the commentator explains, one who is free from all propensities leading to external objects. Manovaham Pranan Nudan, i.e., bringing to sending the vital breaths to the duct called Manovaha or Sushumna. Though a physical act, its accomplishment becomes possible only by a long course of penances consisting in the withdrawal of the mind from external objects. "Reducing the (three) attributes to a state of uniformity," as explained by the commentator, means arriving at Nirvikalpa, i.e., at that state of knowledge which is independent of the senses.]

The mind is sure to gain knowledge. It is the Mind that takes the form of all things. The minds of all high-souled persons, attaining to success through meditation, becomes freed from desire, eternal and luminous.

[Note: The Knowledge here spoken of is that knowledge which is independent of the senses. What the speaker says is that such Knowledge is no myth but is sure to arise. When it arises, its possessor comes to know that the external world, etc., is only the mind transformed, like the sights seen and sounds heard and thoughts cherished in a dream. In the second line the results of that knowledge are declared. The mind of a Mahatma is Mantra-Siddha, i.e., has won success by the meditation of the initial Mantra, or OM; it is Nitya, i.e., eternal, meaning probably that through the result of Maya or Avidya, it is no longer subject to rebirth; it is Virajas, i.e., free from desire and passion, and lastly it is Jyotishmat or luminous, meaning Omniscient and Omnipotent. The commentator cites a passage from Vasishtha's treatise on Yoga, which declares the same results as consequent on the attainment of Knowledge. It is, of course, implied that in attaining to such a state, the mind as mind must be destroyed or merged into the soul and the soul, with knowledge only for its attribute, must exist. In the previous verse emancipation after death has been spoken of. In this Jivan-Mukti or emancipation in life is referred to.]

Therefore, for destroying the mind (as mind), one should do only sinless deeds and freeing oneself from the attributes of Passion and Darkness, one is sure to attain to an end that is very desirable.

[Note: "Freeing oneself from the attributes of Passion and Darkness", i.e., by practising the religion of abstention from acts.]

Knowledge (ordinarily) acquired in younger days becomes weakened with decrepitude. A person, however, of ripe understanding succeeds, through the auspicious effects of past lives, in destroying his desires.

[Note: Adatte from Da meaning to cut or destroy. Manasam Valam as explained by the commentator, is Sankalpam, i.e., desires or purposes. The man of ripe understanding, by doing this, attains to that knowledge which is not subject to decay with age. Hence, such knowledge is superior to knowledge acquired in the ordinary way.]

Such a person, by transcending the bonds of the body and the senses like a traveller crossing a path of obstacles, and transgressing all faults he sees, succeeds in tasting the nectar (of Emancipation).

Aghamarshana Mantra (Prayer for destruction of sin)

1. Om ritam cha satyam chaa abhiddaat tapaso dhyajaayata. Tato raatryajaayata, tatah samudro arnavah.
2. Om samudraadarnavaadadhi samvatsaro ajaayata. Ahoraatraani vidadhad vishwasya mishato vashi.
3. Om surya chandramasu dhaataa yathaa purvamakalpayat. Divam cha prithivim chantarikshamatho swah.

Meaning

This world was created by the luminous God who is the impeller of all actions in accordance with the laws of creation and the laws of life. Primordial matter, which was lying dormant in darkness, began to evolve. By evolution the great expanse of sparkling particles of matter began to gain momentum. This movement of particles brought into existence place and time. Thereafter as a continuation of the process of evolution the Creator of the world divided it into day and night in accordance with His laws.

The support of the world made the sun and the moon; the stars and the earth; the other heavenly objects and self-luminous worlds as in previous cycles of creation.

Brahmacharya (Celibacy)

Teaching of sage Sanat-sujata
From The Mahabharata
Udyoga Parva, sections XLII to XLVII
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Sanata-sujata said: That Brahman about which you ask me with such joy is not to be attained soon. After (the senses have been restrained and) the will has been merged in the pure intellect, the state that succeeds in one of utter absence of worldly thought. Even that is knowledge (leading to the attainment of Brahman). It is attainable only by practising Brahmacharya.

Dhritarashtra said: You say that the knowledge of Brahman dwells of itself in the mind, being only discovered by Brahmacharya; that is dwelling in the mind, it requires for its manifestation no efforts (such as are necessary for work) being manifested (of itself) during the seeking (by means of Brahmacharya). How then is the immortality associated with the attainment of Brahman?

Sanata-sujata said: Though residing in and inherent to the mind, the knowledge of Brahman is still unmanifest. It is by the aid of the pure intellect and Brahmacharya that, that knowledge is made manifest. Indeed, having attained to that knowledge, Yogis forsake this world. It is always to be found among eminent preceptors. I shall now discourse to you on that knowledge.

Nature of Brahmacharya (Celibacy)

Dhritarashtra said: What should be the nature of that Brahmacharya by which the knowledge of Brahman might be attained without much difficulty? O regenerate one, tell me this.

Dwija- (Twice-born)

Sanata-sujata said: They, who residing in the abodes of their preceptors and winning their goodwill and friendship, practise Brahmacharya austerities, become even in this world the embodiments of Brahman and casting off their bodies are united with the Supreme Soul. They that in this world desirous of obtaining the state of Brahman, subdue all desires, and endued as they are with righteousness, they succeed in dissociating the Soul from the body like a blade projected from a clump of heath. The body, O Bharata, is created by these, viz., the father and the mother; the (new) birth, however, that is due to the preceptor's instructions is sacred, free from decrepitude, and immortal.

The four steps of Brahmacharya

Discoursing upon Brahman and granting immortality, he who wraps all persons with (the mantle of) truth, should be regarded as father and mother; and bearing in mind the good he does, one should never do him any injury. A disciple must habitually salute his preceptor with respect, and with purity (of body and mind) and well-directed attention, he must betake to study. He must not consider any service as mean, and must not harbour anger. **Even this is the first step of Brahmacharya**. The practices of that disciple who acquires knowledge by observing the duties ordained for one of his class are regarded also as the first step of Brahmacharya.

A disciple should, with his very life and all his possessions, in thought, word and deed, do all that is agreeable to the preceptor. **This is regarded as the second step of Brahmacharya.** He should behave towards his preceptor's wife and son also in the same way as towards his preceptor himself. This also is regarded as the second step of Brahmacharya.

Bearing well in mind what has been done to him by the preceptor, and understanding also its object, the disciple should, with a delightful heart think: ‘I have been taught and made great by him.’ **This is the third step of Brahmacharya.**

Without requiring the preceptor by payment of the final gift, a wise disciple must not betake to another mode of life; nor should he say or even think of in his mind: ‘I make this gift.’ **This is the fourth step of Brahmacharya.**

He attains the first step of (knowledge of Brahman which is) the object of Brahmacharya by aid of time; the second step, through the preceptor’s prelections; the third, by the power of understanding; and finally, the fourth, by discussion.

The learned have said that Brahmacharya is constituted by the twelve virtues, the Yoga-practices are called its Angas, and perseverance in Yoga-meditation is called its Valam and one is crowned with success in this in consequence of the preceptor’s aid and the understanding of the sense of the Vedas. Whatever wealth a disciple, thus engaged, may earn, should all be given to the preceptor. It is thus that the preceptor obtains his highly praise-worthy livelihood. And thus also should the disciple behave towards the preceptor’s son.

Thus stationed (in Brahmacharya), the disciple thrives by all means in this world and obtains numerous progeny and fame. Men also from all directions shower wealth upon him; and many people come to his abode for practising Brahmacharya. It is through Brahmacharya of this kind that the celestials attained to their divinity, and sages, highly blessed and of great wisdom, have obtained the region of Brahman. It is by this that the Gandharvas and the Apsaras acquired such personal beauty, and it is through Brahmacharya that Surya (the sun) rises to make the day. As the seekers of the philosopher’s stone derive great happiness when they obtain the object of their search those

mentioned above (the celestials and others), on completing their Brahmacharya, derive great happiness in consequence of being able to have whatever they desire.

He' O king, who devoted to the practice of ascetic austerities, betakes himself to Brahmacharya in its entirety and thereby purifies his body, is truly wise, for by this he becomes like a child (free from all evil passions) and triumphs over death at last. Men, O Kshatriya, by work, however pure, obtain only worlds that are perishable. He, however, that is blessed with Knowledge, attains, by the aid of that Knowledge, to Brahman which is everlasting. There is no other path (than Knowledge or the attainment of Brahman) leading to emancipation.

Stay celibate to live longer

Published Date: 05 July 2002
By William Lyons

THE secret of a long life is abstinence from sex, scientists revealed yesterday.
A team from the University of Sheffield believes nuns and spinsters who stay away from the pleasures of the flesh outlive sexually active adults.

The "no sex" strategy for survival came from results found studying the sex lives of beetles at the university’s department of animal and plant sciences. They discovered that mealworm beetles, which mate every day, die young, while those which avoid mating live for much longer.

Dr Michael Siva-Jothey, the leader of the team, said: "Nuns tend to have a longer lifespan than women with children and most people know of someone with a maiden aunt who seems to live forever. The question is, why?

"The beetles which mate die sooner than the beetles which don’t mate. The mechanism is not the same in humans, but the principle is the same.

"In beetles, mating released hormones needed to produce sperm in a male or eggs in a female and that had a negative effect on the immune system.

"The assumption then is that if the immune system is downgraded, that leads to a loss of longevity. It is fair to assume that would be the same with other organisms including humans, because mating has a dual effect - a positive one, but then a negative one on the immune system.

"That is important to evolutionary biologists. The goal of evolution is not to live longer but to leave as many offspring as possible so if you produce a lot of offspring and die young then you have done your job in evolutionary terms.

"It makes perfect sense if you try to understand how sexually transmitted disease evolved and spread. The best time for a disease to find a host is during sexual activity when the immune system is weakened."

The findings are just one in a long line of evidence that suggest that males live longer if they abstain from sex.

In 1997, Dr David Gems, a geneticist at University College London, found that males who remain celibate are more likely to survive into a ripe old age.

He discovered that males are actually designed to live longer, but any help from nature is wiped out by the pursuit of sex.

Dr Gems reached the controversial conclusion while studying nematode worms.